

# GERMAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE PRAGUE AREA SINCE BERNARD BOLZANO

*Herbert Cysarz*

This study presents the first comprehensive survey of the development of philosophy in the Bohemian lands from the 18th to 20th century. This development is at the same time part of the philosophy of old Austria, which ever since the Enlightenment spread through Western and Central Europe, had made numerous new departures of its own. It became involved in prolonged conflicts with the Catholic Church, whereas in Protestant Germany, as a result of the secularization of religion in classical, Romantic, idealistic poetry and philosophy (e. g. the reception of ancient polytheism or the free-thinking presentation of the world order), there were far fewer conflicts. Such conflicts were most pronounced in the Bohemian lands, where the spirit of the Reformation (as, for instance, in the „permanent reformism“ of Comenius) and the inner rejection of the Counter Reformation continued to remain alive.

It was precisely in and around Prague that a scientific, analytical, less

dynamic, frequently anti-voluntaristic and always politically neutral philosophy developed alongside the system of German Idealism (Fichte, Schelling and Hegel). This philosophy was linked to Aristoteles as well as to Descartes or Leibniz, and to Kant's method — though not to his universalism. It was already exemplified by Bernard Bolzano, who is recognized everywhere today as the founder of logistic, and then by the Prague school of Franz Brentano (Carl Stumpf, Marty, Ehrenfels, Oskar Kraus). The influential phenomenology of the Moravian Edmund Husserl was also derived from Bolzano and Brentano.

What can be described as the Austro-Prussian compromise philosophy of the Oldenburg Protestant J. F. Herbart, who, paradoxically enough, became the *praeceptor Austriae* both before and after 1848 and played a decisive role in the Imperial educational system, found its most devoted followers in Prague, among both Germans and Czechs. And from Prague it radiated with renewed vigor back to Vienna (among others, through the philosopher Franz Exner, who was active there for a long period, and such natives of Prague as the aesthetician Robert Zimmermann or the controversial musical theoretician Hanslick).

Soon, however, thanks to Ernst Mach, Friedrich Jodl, Friedrich Mauthner and other precursors of the „Wiener Kreis“, liberalism and progressivism gained the ascendancy. Even Thomas G. Masaryk and Emanuel Rádl, at heart loyal Slavs, opted spiritually for Western positivism. Albert Einstein taught in Prague briefly before 1914, as did the Pan-algebraist Rudolf Carnap in the 1930's. From Moravia came the geneticist Gregor Mendel and the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, Rilke's philosopher-friend Rudolf Kassner, and a number of leading biologists and sociologists. Influences from Vienna and Berlin encountered one another in Bohemia and Silesia — and both autochthonous realistic and even occasionally mystical traditions. Prague was thus not only a wellspring for Franz Kafka but also a forum for basic research in the scientific and intellectual fields.

A picture thus emerges of consequences, competition and convergence in the philosophical spectrum of the Bohemian lands, which has to this day continued to produce a world-wide impact.